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ABSTRACT

An analysis of lexical innovation in Ghanaian English uses ten linguistic categories identified in earlier research on Nigerian English, offering an explanation of each category and a number of examples. The categories include: loanshifts (English words manipulated to produce and transmit meanings beyond purely denotative reference and conveying a range of emotional, attitudinal, and symbolic content); semantic underdifferentiation (neutralization of emotive distinctions between lexical items); lexico-semantic duplication and redundancy ("couldn't be able to"); ellipsis (headword deletion in a nominal group structure); conversion (use of noun as a verb); clipping (subtraction of one or more syllables from a word); acronyms; translation equivalents (translation of native language usage into English); analogical creation formation of new words on the basis of partial likeness or agreement in form or sense with existing words in English); and coinages (invention of lexical items that expand the contextual usefulness of English. Four stages of creation and adoption of lexical innovation are also identified: non-recognition of the local variety; expanding usage; gradual acceptance as the norm; and recognition. Contains 21 references. (MSE)

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Lexical Innovation in Ghanaian English

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Lexical Innovation in Ghanaian English

Ghana (population 15,537,000) is one of the English-speaking West African countries. Having secured its independence from Britain in 1957, the processes of colonization, linguistic imperialism, and neo-colonialism have ensured that the English language remains Ghana's official language of government, administration, law, business, commerce, education, and inter-ethnic unification up till today. The purpose of this paper is to describe and provide a partial corpus of lexical innovation in Ghanaian English (hereafter, GE). The lexical innovation processes in GE are a general pointer to the West African English lexicon since similar processes have been observed in Nigerian English (Bamiro 1994a, 1994b) and Cameroon English (Bobda 1994).

Sey (1973, 67-122) provides a seminal documentation of lexical innovation in GE, which he refers to as 'Ghanaianisms'. He classifies Ghanaianisms into six types according to the deviation from British English as follows: coinages (e.g. *small room*, meaning 'toilet'), semantic extension (e.g. *cloth* has the additional meaning, 'any Ghanaian dress'), semantic restriction (e.g. a *chaser* is a 'philanderer'), combination of semantic restriction and extension (e.g. a *herbalist* is restricted to 'one who cures by the use of medicinal herbs'), semantic transfer (e.g. *Town Council* refers to

the Sanitary Department), and semantic shift (e.g. *park* means 'a football field').

Bokamba (1991, 1992) uses similar categories in discussing lexical innovation in African English. He indicates that lexical items in African English may be created in four principal ways as follows: semantic extension (e.g. *arrangement* refers to 'special arrangement, preferential treatment, or mutual arrangement'), semantic shift (e.g. *machine* means 'sewing machine'), semantic transfer (e.g. *steer* for 'steering wheel'), and coinage (e.g. *my dear* for 'girlfriend' or 'boyfriend'). Like Sey, Bokamba conceptualizes lexical innovation in African English in terms of semantic deviation. However, apart from the fact that notions such as semantic extension, semantic restriction, and semantic shift can be collapsed under the sociolinguistic category of 'loanshifts' (Bamiro 1994a, 49), the use of the term 'deviation' suggests infelicity, inappropriateness, and unacceptability from some perceived 'norms' on the part of the African user of English. Consequently, the term 'deviation' ought to be replaced by the more neutral concepts of 'variation' or 'innovation'.

Bamiro (1994a, 1994b) identifies ten categories of lexico-semantic variation in Nigerian English as follows: loanshift (e.g. *sunshades* for 'sunglasses'), semantic underdifferentiation (which refers to the

neutralization of the emotive distinctions between certain lexical items, e.g., 'small' and 'little' are used with non-emotive distinctions), lexico-semantic duplication and redundancy (e.g. a *stick of cigarette* for 'cigarette'), ellipsis (e.g. *summer* is often used instead of the full form, 'summer vacation'), conversion (e.g. *to paste* is a verb derived from 'to clean one's teeth with toothpaste'), clipping (e.g. *Perm Sec* means 'Permanent Secretary'), acronyms (e.g. *jjcs* means 'Johnnies-just-come'), translation equivalence (e.g. *small festival* is a Yoruba loan translation or calque meaning 'Christmas'), analogical creation (e.g. *gate-man* for 'gate-keeper'), and coinages (e.g. a *watchnight* is a 'vigil kept by Nigerians, often marked by merry-making, during the New Year's Eve').

Data for the documentation and description that follow are based on the five novels of the Ghanaian author, Ayi Kwei Armah, and the novel, *The New Ancestors* (1970), written by the celebrated Canadian author, Dave Godfrey.[1] *The New Ancestors* is principally set in Ghana and, among other things, it embodies Godfrey's linguistic and cultural experience while in that country. According to Michael Larsen, "From 1963 to 1965, Godfrey was in Africa with CUSO (Canadian University Service Overseas). He taught English in Ghana and toured parts of West Africa in a jazz and high-life band, absorbing local history and culture" (1989, 1).

Several linguistic and literary theorists have indicated the importance of the novel in the analysis of socio-linguistic reality. For example, the reader-response theorist and critic, Wolfgang Iser, explains that "Like no other art form before it, the novel was concerned directly with social and historical norms that applied to particular environment, and so it established an immediate link with the empirical reality familiar to its readers" (1974, xi). Braj Kachru has recently indicated that "contact linguistics will gain greater insights about linguistic creativity by considering . . . [literary] texts as data for making language-related generalizations" (1994, 136). Consequently, Godfrey's novel, for example, is significant in the sense that, as a native speaker of English, his documentation of GE lexical items is an eloquent testimony to the sociolinguistic reality that West African English is a fact and not a fiction. It will also be discovered that many of the lexical innovations attested in Godfrey's novel are to be found not only in Armah's novels but also in Nigerian English literature.

In accounting for lexical innovation in GE, I will be using the ten linguistic categories used to probe lexico-semantic variation in Nigerian English (Bamiro 1994a) and the method of documentation and analysis suggested by John Algeo and Adele Algeo in their regular series, "Among

the New Words", in *American Speech*. In the following examples of lexical innovation in GE, the asterisk indicates that such examples cut across the novels of Armah and Godfrey.[2]

Loanshifts

Loanshifts convey many kinds of cultural meanings which add to, transform, or manipulate the denotative senses of English words. In other words, English words are manipulated by Ghanaian users of English to produce and transmit meanings beyond the purely denotative reference of such words, conveying a wide range of emotional, attitudinal, and symbolic content.

***brother** *n* (*BOANYB* 28, *NA* 246) while, for example, in the dominant American cultural discourse, "X of Y family" would be understood to mean "X can only be the brother of Y in the family and no more", we have to consider the wider social meanings attached to a kinship term like *brother* in the West African context. In other words, *brother* is culturally marked to refer to wider communal and extended family relationships in the West African context as opposed to its nuclear semantic feature in the dominant American culture.

bush *adj* (*NA* 93) [of a person] unpolished, uncouth, rustic.

chop *vt* (*NA* 4) to eat food [cf. Bamiro 1994a, 50].

concrete *n* (*BOANYB* 110) a solid food, for example, gari and beans served with palm oil.

corner *n* (*Fragments* 16) a bend in a road [cf. Bamiro 1994a, 50].

dash *n* (*NA* 204, 205) gift, tip, bribe [cf. Bamiro 1991, 13].

hall *n* (n *BOANYB* 127, 128) living room.

high-life** ***n (*BOANYB* 51, NA 252) a special Ghanaian dance or the music for this dance; nocturnal pub-crawling.

jot *n* (*BOANYB* 5) cigarette.

kola *n* (*BOANYB* 107) bribe; cf. American English (hereafter, AmE): "an African tree. . ." or "a sweet, carbonated soft drink flavored with this extract" [*Webster's New World Dictionary* 272][3]; [cf. Bamiro 1994a, 50].

machine *n* (*BOANYB* 148, *Fragments* 154) motorcycle; typewriter.

mobile *adj* (*Fragments* 84) to own a car or to have a car at one's disposal.

nephews *n* (*BOANYB* 27) uneven and oddly shaped set of teeth.

protective custody *n* (*BOAYNB* 157) unlawful and indefinite detention of political dissidents; in AmE, protective custody refers to the protection given to police, secret service, FBI, CIA, etc. informants.

***small boy** *n* (*BOANYB* 110, *NA* 246) erstwhile insignificant members of the Ghanaian society who, owing to their political affiliations, have become wealthy and influential overnight.

stick *n* (*BOANYB* 1, *WAWSB* 64) cigarette [cf. Bamiro 1994a, 49].

to see sb *vt* (*Fragments* 78) to use one's position to influence another person; to bribe another [cf. Bamiro 1991, 13].

wee *n* (*BOANYB* 71, *Fragments* 25) marijuana; in AmE, wee means "very small; tiny" or "very early . . . hours of the morning" [*WNWD* 1514].

SEMANTIC UNDERDIFFERENTIATION

This refers to the tendency of GE users to neutralize or underdifferentiate emotive distinctions between certain lexical items, for example, 'small' and 'little', especially when used as human attributes or epithets. For example, in AmE, "*small* and *little* are often used interchangeably, but *small* is preferred with reference to something concrete, of less than the usual . . . value, importance, etc. . . . and *little* more often applies to absolute concepts . . . in expressing tenderness, indulgence, etc." [*WNWD* 1265]; consequently, *little* is "sometimes used with implications of pleasing or endearing qualities" [*WNWD* 790].

small boy *adj* (*NA* 166).

small girl *adj* (*NA* 54, 57, 293) [cf. Bamiro 1994a, 51].

LEXICO-SEMANTIC DUPLICATION AND REDUNDANCY

This refers to the duplication of lexical items either having identity of reference or belonging to the same semantic field, or the use of a superfluous modifier for emphasis as in the following examples:

couldn't be able to *vi* (*NA* 190) couldn't or not be able to.

soon forthcoming *adj* (*NA* 189) forthcoming.

ELLIPSIS

Ellipsis is generally regarded as "a process of linguistic cohesion that reduces output by omitting material that the speaker assumes the hearer can understand from the linguistic or interactional context" (Bonvillain 1993, 393). Specifically in GE, ellipsis refers to the process whereby the 'headword' is deleted in the nominal group structure in accordance with the principles of least effort and economy of expression. The full congruent version is given after each of the following examples.

440 *n* (*NA* 189) 440 (yards) (race).

880 *n* (*NA* 190) 880 (yards) (race).

Ordinaries *n* (*NA* 217) Ordinary (Level) (Certificate).

secondary *n* (*BOANYB* 33) secondary (school).

CONVERSION

In semantic terms, conversion refers to the penchant of Ghanaian users of English to convert objects, instruments, goals, etc. to material processes or action verbs in accordance with the law of economy of expression. In the following examples, the full congruent versions and the conversion processes are specified after each example.

grenaded *vt* (*NA* 250) to explode sthg. with a grenade:

INSTRUMENT/OBJECT > PROCESS.

telegrammed *vt* (*NA* 192) sent a telegram to sb.: OBJECT > PROCESS.

pacted *vi* (*TTS* 173) signed a pact with sb.: GOAL > PROCESS.

CLIPPING

The term 'clipping' "denotes the subtraction of one or more syllables from a word, which is also available in its full form" (Quirk *et al.* 1972, 1030). According to Quirk *et al.* (*ibid.*), the subtraction may occur at (1) the beginning of the word: phone-telephone, (2) the end of the word (more commonly): photo-photograph, (3) at both ends of the word (rare): flu-influenza. Clipping as lexical innovation in GE aids the speaker or writer to economize his or her expressions. In the following examples, the clippings occur at the end of the words.

cert *n* (*WAWSB* 76) certificate [cf. Bamiro 1994a, 54].

colo *adj* (*NA* 93, 131) colonial.

loco *adj* (*BOANYB* 22, 40, 110) locomotive.

ACRONYMS

The formation of new lexical items by the use of the initial letters of existing words has also produced typical GE acronyms, for example:

C.S.C. *attrib* (*BOANYB* 83) Civil Service Commission.

G.N.T.C. *attrib* (*BOANYB* 9) Ghana National Trading Company.

G.P.O. *attrib* (*NA* 5) General Post Office.

TRANSLATION EQUIVALENTS

Translation equivalents epitomize what some ethnolinguists have referred to as the affective associations in language use. Such affective associations with one's mother tongue are common. Bilingual speakers often feel more emotionally attuned to their mother tongues and are more apt to express feelings through them. Since words and expressions often presuppose underlying cultural values, GE users find it expedient to translate their mother tongues into English in certain contexts as in the following examples:

***big man** *n* (*BOANYB* 3, *NA* 288) affluent members of the Ghanaian society; translates in Akan as *okesee* [cf. Bamiro 1994a, 55].

bush man *n* (*NA* 69, 104, 192) an unpolished, uncouth, or rustic man; translates in Akan as *ha mu mi*.

bush woman *n* (*BOANYB* 129) an uncouth, uncivilized, or countrified woman; translates in Akan as *afuomumi*.

fathers' brothers *n* (*TTS* 52) paternal uncle; translates in Akan as *m e papa nua* [cf. Bamiro 1994a, 56].

in his seat *prep.p* (*BOANYB* 14) in the office or at his desk; translates in Akan as *onni ho* [cf. Bamiro 1991, 12, 1994a, 56].

son of a son of a son of a son . . . *n* (*NA* 213) great great . . . grandson; translates in Akan as *ne nana nana nana nana* . . .

son of my daughter *n* (*TTS* 25) grandson; translates in Akan as *me ba baa ba*.

spirit child *n* (*Healers* 64) a child born to die and who repeats the cycle of life and death to torment his or her parents; translates in Akan as *bagyina*.

tight friend *n* (*BOAYNB* 148) close or bosom friend; translates in Akan as *ma damfo paa*.

white man's drink *n* (*TTS* 108) hard liquor, e.g., gin, brandy, whiskey, etc.; translates in Akan as *bruni nsa*.

ANALOGICAL CREATION

This process refers to "the formation of new words on the basis of partial likeness or agreement in form or in sense with already existing words in English" (Adegbija 1989, 172). Word formation processes in English such as affixation and compounding are very productive analogy models in GE.

fraudulents *n* (*NA* 219) frauds; cf. *equivalents*.

gate-man *n* (*NA* 46, 47) gate-keeper [cf. Bamiro 1994a, 56].

go-slowly *adj* (*NA* 94) proceed in a cautious manner.

house-boys *n* (*NA* 144, 318) house-keepers; the usage, *houseboys*, probably originated from the fact that although the domestic chores of a house-keeper in say, the American context, may be restricted, a houseboy in the West African context is several things at the same time -- driver, baby-sitter, cleaner, cook, launderer, watchman, etc. -- depending on the whims and caprices of his employer. Ironically, the British colonial masters encouraged the use of this word as a form of denigration of their West African servants who, whatever their age, are referred to as *houseboys* or simply as *boys*; cf. *housegirls* [see also Bamiro 1991, 13; 1994a 56].

men friends *n* (*NA* 233) in AmE, boy friends or lovers. This analogy derives from "the strict cultural parameter of non-reciprocal usage in seniority and age existing in the West African society" (Bamiro 1994b, 15); consequently, a homespun Ghanaian girl would consider it unethical to refer to a man much older in age as a boyfriend.

Nkrumaists *n* (*BOANYB* 158) cf. *educationists, typists*, etc.; ardent followers of the late Kwame Nkrumah, the first president of Ghana.

opponenting *adj* (*NA* 186) opposing.

***soja music** *n* (*BOANYB* 57, *NA* 281) martial music.

yessir-men *n* (*BOANYB* 82) also known as *yes-men* in AmE; this refers to persons who give undiscriminating approval to every suggestion or opinion offered by a superior; sycophants. Usage originated from the effusive use of the polite form, 'Yes Sir', by such sycophants.

COINAGES

Chiefly through the process of compounding, Ghanaians invent lexical items that help to expand the contextual usefulness of English. Coinages thus reveal the underlying conceptual systems that help to construct the reality or worldview of Ghanaian users of English. As in other varieties of English, coinages constitute the most productive process of lexical innovation in GE.

***been-to** *n* (*Fragments* 36, *NA* 5) a Ghanaian who had lived or studied abroad, especially in Britain or America [cf. Bamiro 1991, 13].

brown envelope *n* (*NA* 8) euphemism for bribe; usage originated from the practice among Ghanaians to discreetly enclose bribe money in envelopes, not necessarily brown ones, rather than exposing it [cf. Bamiro 1994b, 14].

car-tire sandals *n* (*BOANYB* 101) sandals carved out of worn-out car tires.

***chopbox** *n* (*BOANYB* 204, *NA* 230) a "wooden box of a characteristic shape used for holding food and other articles. Chop boxes may be found in a large number of Ghanaian homes and in secondary schools where each boarder is expected to have one for keeping provisions and books" [Sey 1973, 78].

clothwomen *n* (*NA* 258) Ghanaian women who trade in clothing goods.

coal pot *n* (*BOANYB* 165) "a kind of brazier made of metal or clay, with a lower chamber for collecting ash, and an upper chamber in which a charcoal fire is lighted for cooking" [Sey 1973, 79].

day clerks *n* (*BOANYB* 14) clerks who work during the day, especially in establishments that run essential services, e.g. railway stations.

garden boys *n* (*NA* 231, 265) waiters or stewards; usage originated from the preference of the British colonial masters to be served drinks and foods outdoors owing to the perennial hot and humid tropical climate of Ghana.

hot drink *n* (*Fragments* 5) hard drink such as brandy, whiskey, gin, rum or vodka [cf. Bamiro 1994b, 14].

kapok mattresses *n* (*NA* 172) mattresses stuffed with pads of cotton to serve as foam rubber [cf. *grass mattress* in Bamiro 1994a, 57].

Lorry Park *n* (*NA* 231) a terminus where all kinds of vehicles, especially lorries, are loaded with goods and boarded by passengers [cf. *motor park* in Bamiro 1991, 13; 1994a, 57].

market mammies *n* (*NA* 5) women traders who hawk and sell their goods in the traditional West African marketplaces.

market women *n* (*NA* 10, 66, 211, 291) meaning the same as for *market mammies* [cf. Bamiro 1994b, 14].

mid-day meal *n* (*Healers* 33) lunch.

***national game** *n* (*BOANYB* 129, *NA* 243, 251) the practice of using one's position to steal public funds and engaging in other corrupt deeds; since such social malpractices are so commonplace in Ghana, they

become a sort of national game or pastime for persons in high and low places.

night clerk *n* (*BOANYB* 14) a clerk who works night shifts, especially in organizations that run essential services.

night sweeper *n* (*BOANYB* 32) a janitor who works night shifts.

***outdooring** *adj n* (*Fragments* 86, 87, 94; *NA* 187, 261) ceremonies connected with the christening of a new-born baby.

ownerman *n* (*NA* 257) a man who owns a car as distinct from the driver.

palmwine *n* (*NA* 169) an alcoholic sap which is tapped from various kinds of the oil palm and which is a very common drink in West Africa [Sey 1973, 87].

Party man *n* (*BOANYB* 165) a party loyalist, especially of the late Kwame Nkrumah, the first president of Ghana.

***Passion week** *n* (*BOANYB* 1, *NA* 380) this refers to "that time of the month (normally the fourth week) when there is general financial hardship and pay day is eagerly awaited" [Sey 1973, 106].

push-babies *n* (*BOANYB* 125, 126) maid-servants "employed to mind babies in the house and take them out for rides in prams" [Sey 1973, 88].

***Senior Service** *n* (*BOANYB* 105, 109; *NA* 233) a top position in the Ghanaian civil or public service [cf. Bamiro 1991, 13].

shitman *n* (*BOANYB* 103) a nightsoil man.

theifman [sic] *n* (*NA* 169, 259) a compulsively corrupt man, especially one who uses his position to enrich himself.

***tro-tro bus** *n* (*Fragments* 177, *NA* 236) a kind of mini-van that provides mass transportation for Ghanaians, especially those belonging to the lower socio-economic strata.

upstairs apartment *n* (*NA* 13) a storied building [cf. Bamiro 1994b, 14].

***verandah boys** *n* (*BOANYB* 93, *NA*, 92, 146, 253) these are "ardent followers of Dr. Nkrumah from his early days as a political agitator in the Gold Coast. They were supposed to be the champions of the masses suffering under colonial rule. The implication of the term is that they were willing, like the poor they professed to represent, to accept habitation on verandahs rather than live comfortably like the colonial rulers in mansions. The ideal was kept up throughout the rule of Nkrumah, but in practice it was completely reversed, and with this the term acquired an ironic twinge, which it still has" [Sey 1973, 90].

***white-white** *n* (*BOANYB* 109, *Fragment* 131, *NA* 227) a dressing mode, in the fashion of the British colonialists, that comprises white shirts tucked into white shorts or trousers, and sometimes complete with white socks, shoes, and hat [cf. Bamiro 1994a, 57].

wish-tos *n* (*NA* 5) Ghanaians who dream of traveling overseas, particularly to study in Britain or America.

CONCLUSION.

GE is part of the West African English continuum and many of the lexical innovations identified in this study can also be found in Nigerian English. For example, I have cross-referenced several of the lexical innovations identified in this study with their equivalents attested in Nigerian English in earlier researches (see Bamiro 1991, 1994a, 1994b).

It has been observed that "the non-native institutionalized varieties of English seem to pass through several phases which are not mutually exclusive" (Kachru 1992, 56). According to Kachru (*ibid.*), at the initial stage there is a 'non-recognition' of the local variety, and conscious identification with the native speakers. The second stage is related to extensive diffusion of bilingualism in English which slowly leads to the development of varieties within a variety. The local variety is still low on the attitudinal scale, though it may be widely used in various functions.

The third stage starts when the non-native variety is slowly accepted as the norm, and the division between the linguistic norm and behavior is reduced. The final stage seems to be that of 'recognition', which may manifest itself in attitudinal terms whereby one does not necessarily distinguish between linguistic norm and linguistic behavior. This indicates linguistic realism and attitudinal identification with the variety.

The massive literature on West African English provides enough evidence that this variety of English is in the final stage mentioned by Kachru above. More importantly, the fact that many of the examples attested in the novels of Armah and Godfrey are also found in Nigerian English literature indicates that many lexical innovations in West African English have been stabilized and institutionalized. This therefore underscores the urgent necessity of codifying West African English.

NOTES

An earlier version of this paper was presented at the First International Conference on World Englishes held at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, March 31-April 2, 1994. I am grateful to the conference participants who commented on my presentation.

1. Armah's five novels are the following: *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born* (1969), *Fragments* (1974), *Why Are We So Blest* ? (1974). *Two*

Thousand Seasons (1979), and *The Healers* (1979). The novels are abbreviated in this study as *BOANYB*, *Fragments*, *WAWSB*, *TTS*, and *Healers*, while Godfrey's *The New Ancestors* (1970) is abbreviated as *NA*.

2. The examples of GE lexical items furnished in this study are not idiolectal (that is, coined *ad hoc* by the authors), but are representative of typical GE since they are recurrent and repeatedly observable in the speech and writing of Ghanaian users of English. Thanks are due to Mr. Yaw Adu-Gyamfi and my numerous Ghanaian informants at the University of Saskatchewan not only for confirming this fact, but also for providing me with translations of, and useful information on, the Akan language.

3. Henceforth *WNWD*.

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